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SUBJECT: AUSTRIA'S NEW CABINET: FM SPINDELEGGER

¶1. (U) The following is a profile of Michael Spindelegger, of the conservative People's Party (OVP), who has been named Foreign Minister in the new GOA cabinet.

Experience -----

¶2. (U) Spindelegger was born in the city of Moedling south of Vienna on December 21, 1959. He obtained a law degree from the University of Vienna in 1983. After a one-year stint as a university assistant, he occupied various civil service jobs in the Lower Austrian government before becoming a staffer in the then OVP-held Ministry of Defense (1987-1990). Subsequently, he worked for two years with the Association of Austrian Industrialists, followed by a two-year stint with a large Austrian bank, before returning to the provincial government of Lower Austria.

¶3. (U) Spindelegger started his political career in the labor wing (OeAAB) of the OVP, where he initially covered EU affairs. In 1989 he became chairman of the Lower Austrian state chapter of the OeAAB - a job he has held since. He was elected to Austria's Upper House in 1992; a year later he became OVP deputy to the Lower House (national parliament). After Austria's accession to the EU in 1995, Spindelegger served as one of Austria's first deputies to the European Parliament for one year. Subsequently, Spindelegger served as OVP foreign policy spokesman in the national parliament for 10 years. From 2000 to 2006 he also held the position of OVP deputy floor leader. In October 2006 Spindelegger was elected Second President of Parliament; he was reelected to this post in October 2008, and was nominated a month later as Foreign Minister in the SPO-OVP coalition government. Apart from his political career, Spindelegger also serves as a reserve officer in the Austrian army and honorary president of the National Defense Society.

Political Views -----

¶4. (SBU) Spindelegger had been repeatedly considered a top candidate for a ministerial post, including that of Foreign Minister, during past government formation processes. He is widely viewed as a mainstream conservative politician with a strong Christian-based world view. Spindelegger is a supporter of the SOS Kinderdorf (orphans') organization in his home area in Lower Austria. He is on record opposing liberalization of Austria's relatively restrictive laws on homosexual partnerships.

Family -----

¶5. (U) Spindelegger is married; his wife's name is Margit. The couple has two sons, Matthias and Patrick. His wife reportedly served as chef-de-cabinet for the president of the European Audit Court until 2008.

Comment: EU, UNSC Challenges -----

¶6. (SBU) EU policy is likely to be a challenge for Spindelegger

during his tenure. The SPO has called for national referenda on future EU treaties, which the OVP sharply opposes. The coalition parties managed to set aside their differences when each agreed not to enact a referendum on any EU treaty against the will of the other party. Nevertheless, a dispute over a referendum could bring the government down. Spindelegger will also have to look for ways to encourage more support for the EU among the skeptical Austrian public. European parliamentary elections are set for June 2009, and many fear that Austrian voter apathy will contribute to an embarrassingly strong showing by the far right.

17. (SBU) Spindelegger will also guide Austria through its two-year UNSC membership, which starts January 1, 2009. Austria will be under domestic pressure to promote "thematic" discussion on issues such as the environment and women's rights, while at the same time being pressed to weigh in on more difficult issues such as Iran sanctions.

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